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UNCLAS SINGAPORE 001190

FOR R - U/S GLASSMAN, EAP/PD - RFERGUSON-AUGUSTUS, PA/FPC -
SMACTAGGART, EAP AND EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SINGAPORE MEDIA REACTION TO U.S. PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION

¶1. (U) Summary: In cooperation with the American Association of Singapore and the American Chamber of Commerce, the Embassy held an Election Day brunch event at the American Club on November 5. Over 250 Americans and Singaporeans gathered to watch the results come in. This event capped a popular series of Embassy-organized talks and events centered on the U.S. Presidential Election. The election attracted major attention in Singapore and the results received unprecedented coverage in the local media. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The Election Day event received heavy turnout and many people had to be turned away at the door. In addition to projection screens showing election results, this event featured conference calls with political commentators back in the United States including Steven Akey, Mike McCurry, Bruce Mehlman and former Ambassador to Singapore Frank Lavin. The Embassy guests included several ambassadors, contacts from various sections at the Embassy and a few high school students and teachers from one of Post's American Connections partners. The event received print, radio and television coverage with 10 journalists in attendance.

¶3. (U) In the lead up to the election, Ambassador Herbold and DCM Shields made presentations to Singaporean students, civic groups, journalists and American Connections partners about the U.S. electoral process and what made this election unique. These talks received rave reviews with more than one audience member saying that they felt they understood the Electoral College system for the first time.

¶4. (U) The Embassy organized a debate between two Democrats and two Republicans at the Jurong Regional Library, one of Post's American Connections partners, on November 3. The debaters - two professors, a former state lawmaker, and a businessman - were well-prepared and passionate advocates for their parties and candidates. Members of the audience jumped into the fray during the question and answer portion of the event. The event received television coverage from Channel NewsAsia.

¶5. (U) The Singapore press gave the U.S. election heavy coverage both during the campaign and after the results came out. The Straits Times, Singapore's leading newspaper, ran an unprecedented nine pages of coverage of the results, including analysis and commentary. This exceeds the coverage normally given to Singapore's own election results. The Straits Times said, "If there is anyone out there who still doubts that the US is really and truly multi-ethnic; who still wonders if the dream of its founders can be exceeded; who still questions the power of its polka-dot democracy, tonight is your answer."

¶6. (U) Senator Obama's victory has generated debate as to whether a non-Chinese could be elected Prime Minister in Singapore, where 76 percent of the population is ethnically Chinese. The New Paper tabloid said, "Overnight, American voters put us to shame. They voted in a black president, while Singaporeans will still baulk at accepting a non-Chinese prime minister, say some political top guns and many observers. In the evolution of democratic politics, Americans just took a giant step forward. Meanwhile, Singaporeans are still lumbering along like Third World

tribes, dragging our baggage of racial hang-ups." An opinion piece in the Malay-language Berita Harian asked, "Can we imagine what if an Obama emerged and won here? Could this be accepted as a victory for all of the people in this country, not just something one particular race or group could be proud of?"

¶17. (U) The U.S. elections have also sparked some mild discussion of Singapore's political system. Sue-Ann Chia, one of 6 journalists the Embassy sent to the United States on various programs this election season, wrote an article on November 7 describing local elections in the United States. She said, "In the US, grassroots democracy is an integral part of its political system, one which treasures the value of choice and contest at all levels." She proposed that Singapore adopt a system of local elections to promote active citizenry. One of Singapore's more prominent bloggers, "Mr. Brown," who sometimes pushes Singapore's boundaries in criticizing the government, wrote on November 6 that he would hang on to an Obama bumper sticker to remind himself that "change can happen." The comments to that post expressed envy for the U.S. electoral system and were generally pessimistic as to whether political change would soon come to Singapore.

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